

## Settlement Agreement

This Settlement Agreement (this "Agreement") is dated March 1, 2002 (the "Effective Date"), and is between Qwest Corporation, a Colorado corporation ("Qwest"), and Eschelon Telecom, Inc., a Delaware corporation ("Eschelon"). Qwest and Eschelon are referred to collectively as the "Parties" and individually as the "Party."

Whereas, Qwest is an incumbent local exchange carrier operating in the states of Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming;

Whereas, Eschelon is a competitive local exchange carrier operating in the states of Arizona, Colorado, Minnesota, Oregon, Utah, and Washington, as well as Nevada;

Whereas, each of the Parties seeks to avoid delay and costly litigation and to resolve certain issues in dispute.

Qwest and Eschelon therefore agree as follows:

1. Definitions. When used in this Agreement, the following terms have the following meanings:

"Act" means the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

"CABS" means carrier access billing system.

"Claims" means, individually and collectively, each and every claim, action, causes of action, suit, demand, damage, judgment, execution, cost, expense, liability, controversy, setoff, omission, and loss of any kind whatsoever, whether known or unknown, whether in law or in equity, including any related interest expenses that may have accrued in connection therewith, from the beginning of time through February 28, 2002, that Eschelon or Qwest has, had or may have against the other Party arising out of the Disputes through February 28, 2002.

"Disputes" means, for the time period through February 28, 2002: (1) disputes concerning service credits; (2) disputes concerning consulting and network-related services provided by Eschelon to Qwest; (3) CABS disputes concerning switched access minutes of use; (4) disputes concerning payment of UNE-E line and UNE-E Non-Recurring Charge credits; and (5) disputes concerning Eschelon's claims of anti-competitive conduct and unfair competition.

"Interconnection Agreement" means the interconnection agreements and all amendments thereto filed with the PUC in each state in which Eschelon obtains services and facilities from Qwest.

"PUC" means state public utility commission.

03/06/02 10:40 AM

Settlement Agreement

Page 1 of 6

Qwest  
Exhibit 18

\\DC - 66983/45 - #1488679 v2

"Terminated Agreements" has the meaning set forth in paragraph 3(b) below.

"UNE-E" means Unbundled Network Element – Eschelon, a product purchased by Eschelon under its Interconnection Agreement, as amended in November of 2000 and July and August of 2001.

"UNE-P" means Unbundled Network Element – Platform.

2. Release of Claims. (a) For valuable consideration to be paid by Qwest to Eschelon as provided in Paragraph 3(a) below, Eschelon hereby fully waives, releases, acquits, and discharges Qwest and its associates, owners, stockholders, successors, assigns, partners, parents, insurance carriers, bonding companies, affiliates and subsidiaries, and each of their respective directors, officers, agents, employees and representatives from any and all Claims arising out of the Disputes through February 28, 2002.

(b) In consideration of the waiver and release described in Paragraph 2(a) above, Qwest hereby fully waives, releases, acquits, and discharges Eschelon and its associates, owners, stockholders, successors, assigns, partners, parents, insurance carriers, bonding companies, affiliates and subsidiaries, and each of their respective directors, officers, agents, employees and representatives from any and all Claims arising out of the Disputes through February 28, 2002.

3. Actions to be Taken. The Parties shall undertake the following actions:

(a) On the Effective Date, Qwest shall provide payment, using credits, to Eschelon in an amount equal to \$7,912,000, with offsets as follows: (i) apply \$6,380,000 against UNE-E charges and associated charges that are not disputed by the Parties as of February 28, 2002; and (ii) apply and credit \$1,532,000 — which sum represents \$7,912,000 less \$6,380,000 — against all current and non-disputed invoices that are payable by Eschelon to Qwest. Eschelon shall determine how the offset amounts in each of clauses (i) and (ii) will be applied and shall so designate in writing to Qwest within ten days of the Effective Date.

(b) For convenience and various reasons, the Parties hereby terminate the following agreements ("Terminated Agreements"), as of the Effective Date:

- (1) Feature Letter dated November 15, 2000;
- (2) Implementation Plan Letter dated November 15, 2000;
- (3) Escalation procedures and business solution letter dated November 15, 2000;
- (4) Confidential Purchase Agreement dated November 15, 2000;
- (5) Confidential Amendment to Confidential/Trade Secret Stipulation dated November 15, 2000;
- (6) Third Amendment to Confidential/Trade Secret Agreement dated July 3, 2001;
- (7) Status of switched access minute reporting letter dated July 3, 2001; and
- (8) Implementation Plan dated July 31, 2001/August 1, 2001.

03/06/02 10:40 AM

Settlement Agreement

Page 2 of 6

\\DC-66983/45 - #1488679 v2

(c) Attachment 3 to the Implementation Plan dated July 31, 2001/August 1, 2001 relating to UNE-E will continue to bind the Parties unless the Parties agree otherwise in a writing executed by both Parties. Eschelon agrees that Qwest will file this Attachment 3 as an amendment to the Interconnection Agreement.

(d) The Billing/Usage letter dated November 15, 2000 will be terminated when the Parties agree the manual process is terminated and Eschelon moves to the mechanized process described in Paragraph 3(g) below.

(e) Qwest shall make the UNE-E offering and existing business processes related to the UNE-E offering available to Eschelon through the current term of the Interconnection Agreement Amendment Terms dated November 15, 2000.

(f) Within ten days of the Effective Date, the Parties shall form a joint team. The purpose of the joint team shall be to develop a mutually acceptable plan (the "Plan") to convert UNE-E lines to UNE - P. Qwest and Eschelon shall use best efforts to cooperate in converting UNE-E lines to UNE-P in accordance with the Plan..

(g) Qwest and Eschelon shall work closely together in moving Eschelon from a manual to a mechanized process so that Eschelon can bill for access on UNE-P. The Parties shall work closely for 60 days to validate working telephone numbers and associated minutes of use, and will terminate the manual process after these 60 days with the consent of both Parties. If the parties are unable to agree on the date of the termination of the manual process, then the Parties shall follow the procedures described in paragraph 8 below.

(h) Level 3 Escalation. Upon execution of this Agreement, Eschelon's February 8, 2002 request for a Level 3 escalation will be deemed permanently withdrawn.

4. Successors and Assigns. The terms and conditions contained in this Agreement shall inure to the benefit of and be binding upon, the respective successors, affiliates and assigns of the Parties.

5. Assignment of Claims. No Party has assigned or transferred to any person any Claim, or portion of any Claim, released or discharged by this Agreement.

6. Filing of Agreement. The Parties agree that negotiation of this Agreement is subject to Rule 408 of the Federal Rules of Evidence, and similar rules at the state level. Notwithstanding the foregoing, nothing in this Agreement shall prevent a Party from asserting a claim against the other Party to enforce this Agreement and nothing herein shall bar a Party from filing this Agreement as it deems necessary and appropriate in order to comply with state or federal law, or in connection with a relevant legal or regulatory proceeding in which Qwest or Eschelon is a party. Qwest and Eschelon expressly contemplate that this Agreement will be filed

03/06/02 10:40 AM

Settlement Agreement

Page 3 of 6

\\DC - 66983/45 - #1488679 v2

with the PUCs in its region in states where Eschelon is certified and has an interconnection agreement.

7. Entire Agreement; Amendments. This Agreement constitutes the entire agreement between the Parties. This Agreement can be amended or changed only in a writing or writings executed by both of the Parties, except that this Agreement must not be amended or modified in any way by electronic message or e-mail communications.

8. Dispute Resolution. Each Party reserves its rights to resort to all remedies, including seeking resolution by a PUC or a court, agency, arbitrator, or regulatory authority of competent jurisdiction.

9. Notices. Except as otherwise provided in this Agreement, every notice or other communication to a Party required, permitted or contemplated under this Agreement must be in writing and (a) served personally, in which case delivery will be deemed to occur at the time and on the day of delivery; (b) delivered by certified mail or registered mail, postage prepaid, return receipt requested, in which case delivery will be deemed to occur the day it is officially recorded by the U.S. Postal Service as delivered to the intended recipient; or (c) delivered by next-day delivery to a U.S. address by recognized overnight delivery service such as Federal Express, in which case delivery will be deemed to occur upon receipt. Upon prior agreement of the Parties' designated recipients identified below, notice may also be provided by facsimile. Except as otherwise provided in this Agreement, every notice or other communication must be delivered using one of the alternatives mentioned in this paragraph and must be directed to the applicable address indicated below or such address as the Party to be notified has designated by giving written notice in compliance with this paragraph:

If to Qwest:

Qwest Corporation  
Attention: General Counsel  
1801 California Street, Suite 5200  
Denver, Colorado 80202  
Tel: (303) 672-2700  
Fax: (303) 295-7046

If to Eschelon:

Eschelon Telecom, Inc.  
Attention: General Counsel  
730 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, Suite 1200  
Minneapolis, MN 55402  
Tel: (612) 436-6692  
Fax: (612) 436-6792

10. No Waiver. The Parties agree that their entering into this Agreement is without prejudice to, and does not waive, any positions they may have taken previously, or may take in the future, in any legislative, regulatory, judicial, or other forum addressing any matters other than the Claims.

11. No Admission. The Parties acknowledge and agree that they have legitimate disputes relating to the issues described in this Agreement, and that the resolution reached in this Agreement represents a compromise of the Parties' positions. Therefore, the Parties deny any wrongdoing or liability and expressly agree that resolution of the issues

03/06/02 10:40 AM

Settlement Agreement

Page 4 of 6

\\DC-66983/45 - #1488679 v2

contained in this Agreement cannot be used against the other Party in any manner or in any forum (except for claims related to breaches of this Agreement).

12. Counterparts. This Agreement may be executed by facsimile and in counterparts, each of which is an original and all of which together constitute one and the same instrument.

**EXECUTION PAGE FOLLOWS**

03/06/02 10:40 AM

*Settlement Agreement*


Page 5 of 6

\\DC - 66983/45 - #1488679 v2

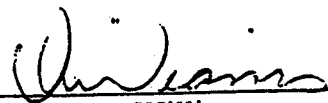
**Counterpart Execution Page  
Settlement Agreement**

The undersigned are executing this Settlement Agreement on the date stated in the introductory clause.

**QWEST CORPORATION**

By:   
Name: Dana Filip  
Title: Senior Vice President

**ESCHELON TELECOM, INC.**

By:   
Name: Clifford D. Williams  
Title: Chief Executive Officer

03/06/02 10:40 AM

Settlement Agreement

Page 6 of 6

\\DC - 66983/45 - #1488679 v2